

*News and  
Stories  
from the  
people of  
FCC of  
Anchorage*

April 2021

# The Northern Light

First Congregational Church of Anchorage

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## Message from the Moderator

### NORMAL TO WEIRD TO NEW NORMAL? OR OLD TO WEIRD TO STILL WEIRD?

Nothing is normal anymore, and everything weird has become sort of normal.

On Sunday mornings I still wake up and wonder what shall I wear today, when do I need to leave for church? Oops, there is no need to dress up, no need to get in the car or shovel the driveway. I just need to clear off the couch and find my laptop. I know exactly what to do when I finally re-remember the pandemic, how we do things now.

I think I use “Zoom” in every sentence now and everything I do seems to be a Zoom event.

Sigh.

Although the current “normal” is actually quite convenient and requires little energy, I rather miss driving to church, checking out

the icicles hanging off the church roof (or the flowers in the gardens once the snow goes away), greeting others and being greeted by them, sitting in a pew or in the choir section, hearing the rustle of papers and the whispers, seeing the hugging, and singing with others.

At long last, after months of deliberately restricting our services and meetings to Zoom rooms, the FCC Worship Ministry and the FCC Church Council are thinking that we can try offering in-person worship services – but only for those who are comfortable doing so. We plan to have the services be “hybrid-services”, so that they will always also be available on Zoom to anyone who wants or feels the need for that.

So, this week we are trying out our first such in-person hybrid service on Good

Friday. Midweek services normally have a low attendance, so we are unlikely to have problems having sufficient space to keep our social distance.

What will be our normal for the foreseeable future while have hybrid services? Those who come to church will all wear masks, of course, and will sit spaced apart on the pews. People who have not been vaccinated will be encouraged to participate via Zoom only and not to come to the in-person event. At least for a while, we will not sing to better avoid spreading germs.

See you in church via the old normal newly envisioned and/or the new hybrid normal and/or the one-year old Zoom normal! We will continue to meet no matter what, however we can!

-Lynn Barber

## Fellowship Ministry

I hope April 18th is marked on your calendar as a special day because that's when we will gather for the Spring Semi-annual Congregational Meeting immediately after our worship service and in the same Zoom room. At this meeting, we will hold elections to fill positions on our ministries and committees, people to carry on with the work of our church during the next year. Your Fellowship Ministry has two openings, and I'm asking you to either nominate yourself or another, so we can continue to fulfill the Ministry's mission as described on the website.

Humans are social creatures. We evolved to participate in community, to forge lasting bonds with others, to help one another, and to share life experiences. We are, simply, better together.

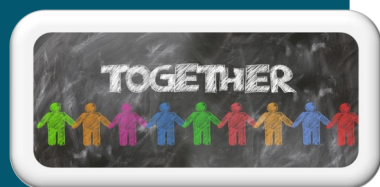
For this reason, the Fellowship Ministry's focus is our belief that caring for each other can be one very powerful way to help us not just endure but flourish. When we're thinking about the welfare of others and working to make their lives safer, healthier, and more satisfying, our time and energy

flow outward. Our lives have a purpose beyond survival; we are more likely to feel that we can make a difference, have control over our situation, and look forward to each new day.

In these days of physical distancing, some of the usual ways we interact for information and to strengthen our sense of togetherness are not available. Therefore, we've created some new ways to gather together while we're apart. All are welcome to join in, even if it's just to say "Hello" in one Zoom room as they zip over to meet in another.

Now that the Church is starting to plan when and how we'll get back together physically, the work of the Fellowship Ministry will be to look carefully at how we can fulfill our mission while keeping everyone as safe as possible. We need your good ideas, so please let the Nominating Committee (Jim Munter and Kathy Means) know that they can add your name as a nominee for the Fellowship Ministry to the slate for the election on April 18th.

*-Kate O'Dell; chair*



## Life & Learning Ministry

It's now been a full year since the Youth met regularly in person. It has been difficult to get the youth together, but we have worked out some creative solutions, from the online Youth Sunday service and Christmas Pageant, to socially distanced gardening, hiking, and crab-apple sauce production. For Easter Sunday, the youth will take turns reading an allegorical Easter story for the Children's Moment. We're hopeful that we can start getting together in person soon.

*-Marcie Errico; chair*

# Nominating Committee



COVID-19 has changed how we are approaching the process of preparing for our election of Church Officers and Ministry members to be held at our semi-annual meeting in April.

Now you can click a link in the Daily Update and view positions that need to be filled for the 2021-2023 period, or you can call one of us to discuss the Church's needs. There are also a few one-year terms available. You can see what all of our Ministries are doing in the church newsletters, which are archived on the website.

This is an opportunity for you to self-select how you would like to serve the Church. Please carefully consider your abilities, interests, and the needs of the Church and decide whether you can be an active part of fulfilling our mission. If you can commit to serve, it will make a real difference in the life of the Church and you are wholeheartedly thanked!

Feel free to call Jim at 345-0165 or Kathy at 441-7127 if you would like to discuss anything.

*-Jim Munter and Kathy Means; FCC Nominating Committee members*

## Welcome Covenant Vote

Anyone that receives the church's Daily Update has probably noticed that there is a lot of talk about the Welcome Covenant and the Open & Affirming (ONA) process. That is because as a congregation, we are coming to an important vote at the April 18th Spring Semi-annual meeting. Our church has long considered ourselves as a welcoming church for everyone to join in worship and to participate as members of our community. The proposed welcome covenant is a declaration of that welcome in a formal and public way. Its intention is to let people know that when we say "All are welcome," we do mean everyone. It is also a promise that we will continue to learn, grow, and act in our faith as a congregation, especially as it relates to creating a loving and supportive community for all.

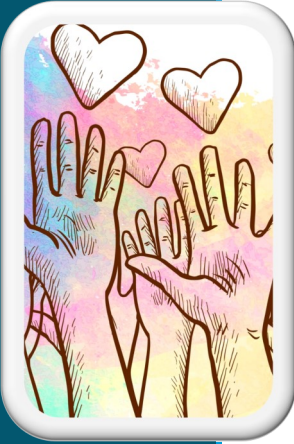
If you haven't joined any of the Friday night ONA classes, you are still invited to join for the final two weeks. They do not rely on previous weeks so you won't be "behind" the group. April 9th will cover the topic of Queer Theology, and April 16th will be a final Question & Answer session, and a preview of the proposed Welcome covenant that will be voted on in our meeting on April 18th. If coming to a Zoom meeting is just not your thing, members of the ONA planning group or Rev. Jacob are happy to chat with you and answer your questions or hear your feedback. The members of the ONA planning group are Jenna Amber, Dave Barber, Krystal Poindexter, Miguel De Marzo, and Eric Johnson.

Congregationalism has a long history of using covenants. Covenants are the foundation of what unites us as a church. A covenant is an act of faith, a solemn promise to God and to each other—an ONA covenant is a serious step for a congregation in its life of faith. As we prepare to vote on a welcome covenant for our congregation, it is important that we reflect on who we are as a community of faith, and how we can share our love and welcome with those that may be seeking a safe place to learn, grow, and act in their own faith.

*-Krystal Poindexter*

**"A covenant is an act of faith, a solemn promise to God and to each other"**

# Outreach Ministry



Great News! We had a meeting with Abigail Owens from Volunteers on America (VOA) and received a full update on what is happening with the Grandfamilies' Program. It has since been renamed "Kinship Family Program" to be more inclusive as to the types of families that are involved in raising children when their parents are unable to support them. The program is providing many activities for these families such as on-line Bingo, paint night, book club, visit to the zoo, and movie night. VOA has set up a food pantry for those families at Trailside Heights; food and other item can be donated on Tuesdays and Fridays. For further information, contact Ms. Owens at [aowens@voaak.org](mailto:aowens@voaak.org). We will be hosting a brunch for the families again at Christmas!

- Donations for Advocates in Residence (AIR) can be dropped off in the narthex.
- Open and Affirming (ONA) is formulating a statement as to what our church is as an inclusive place for all.
- Our sponsored student at the Panamerican Institute is making progress in spite of Covid 19 and internet problems. He is working hard in all his courses and is trying to improve in his Spanish and Mathematics. His best subject is English!
- We are still supporting the Children's Lunchbox program.
- Food donations for FISH can be dropped off in the Narthex.

*-Chris Walker; chair*

**As we begin to gather in-person, it is vital that each person asks themselves these questions. Any answer of "yes" means that you should stay home**

## COVID-19 Self-Screening Assessment

If you answer "Yes" to any of the following questions, please stay home.



### ■ Fever

Have you had any history of fever in the last 14 days?

### ■ Travel

Have you or any household member traveled to an international area or to areas of suspected community spread in the last 14 days?

### ■ Respiration

Have you had any history of respiratory illness such as a cough or difficult breathing in the last 14 days?

### ■ COVID Contact

In the past 14 days, have you or any household member been in contact with a known COVID-19 patient?



# Unfocus for Brain Health

**Story by Stephanie O'Neill and Audrey Nguyen: *Too Much Focusing Is Draining. Here's A Better Strategy* (From NPR, March 21, 2021 )**

Getting and staying focused can be a challenge in the best of times. But with everything going on in the world, concentrating can often feel down-right impossible.



Testament to that challenge is the burgeoning self-help industry bursting with books, blogs, videos and TED Talks on the topic. There's even a site called Caveday where the focus-challenged gather together on Zoom — computer cameras switched on for accountability, all other technology put away — for deep-focus work sessions. Among other things, it requires that participants "monotask," because multitasking distracts our brains and prevents us from entering true focus and flow.

What happens instead when we try to multitask, says Gloria Mark, Ph.D., is that our brains switch among tasks, requiring more brain fuel than staying with one task at a time.

"Every activity we do uses a different set of cognitive resources," says Mark, an informatics professor at the University of California, Irvine. "If I do email, I'm using one set of cognitive resources. If I'm reading a report, I'm using a different set of resources."

The more tasks you try to do at any given time, the more cognitive energy you burn.

Another overconsumer of brain fuel is overfocusing, says Dr. Srini Pillay, a psychiatrist and the author of *Tinker Dabble Doodle Try: Unlock the Power of the Unfocused Mind*.

As the title suggests, Pillay believes "unfocusing" your mind, or purposefully letting it wander, is key to improving focus overall. The brain, he says, does its best work when it's allowed to toggle between focus and unfocus.

Which leads to the first of five tips to help you find your flow.

Engage in positive constructive daydreaming. This involves first turning your attention inward. Try traveling with your mind to someplace enjoyable — maybe it's a stroll through an imaginary forest or sunbathing on a warm, sandy beach. Pair your daydreaming with some form of low-key activity such as walking, knitting, gardening. Release your mind for about 20 minutes of this fun and watch what happens. Doing so — especially when working hard on a project — will help to open up the brain's "default mode network." Doing this several times a day can offer your mind a fresh approach to the job at hand.

Block interruptions before diving into deep work. Our days are filled with distractions, from others and ourselves. To help, turn off text messaging, notifications and social media alerts. Pretty basic? Sure, but vital when you want a deep dive into focus, Mark says. When distracting interruptions are shut off, our brains get a chance to complete full sentences of thought. Your important work, she says, benefits when you shut off or put away your phone and other screens. Then, plan a time to respond — after you've completed a period of sustained focus.

Know your chronobiology. Make friends with your body clock. Are you a lark who is sharp and alert in the morning? Or is night owl more your style? Either way, it doesn't matter as long as you schedule your most important projects during your brain's periods of peak performance. Mark says resist the temptation to spend your day — in particular your peak brain hours — doing busywork. Instead, reserve your best brain time for the big stuff.

Try new hobbies. Dabbling in hobbies not only is fun but can help us come up with new solutions to problems we're facing at work or home, Pillay says. Allowing your mind time to play is another way to invite innovation in ways that focusing doesn't.

Consider a digital sabbath. There's a lot of talk these days about the benefits of shutting off your devices — and for good reason. Taking a digital sabbath — intentionally setting aside time to rest from your screens and all their interruptions — offers an important benefit, Mark says. It reminds us there's a world outside our screens, helping us to "reset and think about what's really important."



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A service that explores other  
ways to engage our faith and  
spirituality together.



*Member of the National  
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**Year Round Delegate**  
Kate O'Dell